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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the provision of end-user search services in the libraries of the University of Ottawa using BRS/After Dark. It is noted that the service--Online After Six--is available during the evening hours to university faculty, students, and staff and to the general public. Program planning stages, service regulations, fees charged, and publicity methods are described. Based on initial usage of the system by education students, it is reported that difficulties encountered by clients and library staff included problems in using Boolean logic and the online print commands, low awareness of the range of databases relevant to any particular question, and the need for more extensive user assistance than was originally anticipated. Positive outcomes of the program are also outlined, e.g., 40% of the end users had fully satisfactory search results, even as first time users. The necessary prerequisites for an after-hours end-user search service in an academic library are concluded to be a positive perception of the possibilities such a service may offer clients; groundwork to convince the library administration that the project is feasible; careful planning, coordination, and training of staff prior to service start-up; provision of quality documentation to end users; and arresting publicity. A seven-item bibliography is provided. (ESR)

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ONLINE AFTER SIX: THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA'S EXPERIENCE WITH BRS/AFTER DARK

Paper given at the 8th. annual **BRS User Meeting**
Boston, Mass., Oct. 31, 1983

Almost as soon as **BRS/After Dark** began service in January of this year, the University of Ottawa took a keen interest in it. As a result of the sharp increase in the overall number of online searches we performed in Fiscal Year 1982 - 1983, up 1,000 from the previous year to some 2,500, we felt we should investigate ways of streamlining our online services. The steady rise in searches has resulted in a much greater number of searches per librarian. This has lead to problems in staff allocation, not only for online searching, but for other regular reference duties. **BRS/After Dark** seemed to offer us an avenue for experimentation.

Thus, in March, 1983, we ran a three week Pilot Project Survey of End Users, inviting 25 clients on 5 evenings, in time slots of 45 minutes total per person. After a brief demonstration by an experienced online searcher, each client was asked to run his or her own search. The results of this Pilot Project are reported on pp. 20 -25 of my article, "BRS After **Dark:** the Birth of Online Self-Service", in the September 1983 issue of Online. At the **BRS** User Meeting, using an OSBORNE 1 microcomputer, I will display on overhead monitors the results of each question in this Survey.

ONLINE AFTER SIX:

The outcome of the March Survey was the establishment of a full after-hours end-user search service, called **Online After Six**, in Morisset Library (social sciences), on July 4th., 1983. On September 12th., the service was extended to include Vanier Library (science) and the Health Sciences Library. Initially, hours of availability are 6 - 8:30 pm., Monday to Thursday in all three libraries. The service is open to use by faculty, students and staff of the University of Ottawa, and to the general public.

NEW SURVEY OF OUR FIRST 100 END-USERS:

We are presently surveying our first 100 end-users in an expanded Survey similar to the March Pilot Project Survey. This new survey of actual end-users running real-time searches in an established after hours online self-service should throw further light on the impact **Online After Six** will have on our traditional Reference and Computer Search Services in the first six months or so of its existence.

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PLANNING:

Implementation of our **Online After Six** service required many man-hours of careful planning and coordination by the Library System's Computer Search Service Committee, from March to June, 1983. Questions concerning the mode of operation, method of charging end-users, publicity and impact on other public services, especially Reference, were all weighed. We believe we have as a result devised a workable operational model for an on site library end-user search service.

Two issues central to the effective functioning of **Online After Six** are: how much should we charge end-users? And, what regulations would be required to ensure maximum service for all users? We finally settled on a "block" charging scheme, whereby end-users pay $C 2.00 per five (5) minutes of connect time or part thereof *.

REGULATIONS:

The Regulations, prominently posted, are as follows:

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ONLINE AFTER SIX

ONLINE AFTER SIX is a low cost service, offered to individuals who wish to run their own bibliographic searches online.

COST:

Students and staff associated with the University of Ottawa:
. Two dollars ($2.00)* per five (5) minutes block

External users:
. Three dollars ($3.00) per five (5) minutes block

N.B. A "block" consists of a unit of five (5) minutes, or part thereof.

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*Since there is to date no international telecommunications rates agreement between Canada and the United States covering special low evening connect rates, Canadian subscribers to BRS After Dark are obliged to pay an additional $6.00 US per hour for every database searched. Thus, the rates vary from a low of $12.00 US for ERIC to a high of $21.00 US for ABI/INFORM. These rates are even higher in Canadian dollars. Nevertheless, such rates are two to three times lower than in the daytime.

HOURS OF SERVICE:

. From 6:00 pm. to 8:30 pm., Monday to Thursday

LOCATIONS:

. Morisset Library (65 Hastey Ave.)	July, 1983
. Vanier Library (11 Somerset St. East)	Sept., 1983
. Health Sciences Library (451 Smyth Road)	Sept., 1983

REGULATIONS:

. The user leaves an identity card or $5.00 deposit
. The computer search is paid for in cash, by cheque or debited to a research grant
. The timer count begins when the password is entered on the terminal
. When several users are lined up to use the service, a time limit of 20 minutes per person is imposed
. **Online After Six** is a do-it-yourself computer service. In the evening users run their own searches with a minimum of help from the librarian. If they run into difficulty with their search, users may refer to the daytime Computer Search Service for help in improving their search strategy
. **Online After Six** is a simplified service that does not offer all the sophistication of the daytime service. In certain cases, the end-user may need to refer to the daytime Computer Search Service for a more comprehensive search.

THE LIBRARY ACCEPTS NO RESPONSIBILITY WHATSOEVER FOR THE COST OR FOR THE RESULTS OF YOUR SEARCH

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A step-by-step inhouse search manual, explaining how to use **BRS/After Dark**, is kept at the Reference Desk for end-users to consult. Two terminals, one 300 BAUD and one 1200, are available to end-user searchers.

PUBLICITY:

In the first two months of the new service (July and August), publicity was confined to the public display of our **Online After Six** posters, which are the very attractive posters supplied by **BRS/After Dark**. During the service's summer start-up, these posters were strategically located in the Reference

Department, near the card and online catalogues, above the ERIC microfiche collection in the microforms section on the sixth floor and in the Periodicals room of Morisset Library, as well as in the Library and key classrooms of the Faculty of Education. The accompanying slide presentation gives a picture of the actual layout of our **Online After Six** equipment and of our advertising, illustrating clients using the service.

In September, with the advent of the fall semester, we plan to run a concerted publicity blitz, with articles in the University Gazette, and the English and French student newspapers.

INITIAL USAGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE SERVICE

Until September at least, our initial target end-users were special education students who were taking the Faculty of Education's regular summer courses. We had hoped from the very beginning that our end-users would avail themselves of the new **Online After Six** service primarily to search ERIC and ECER, to support their special courses in Education. As it turned out, they did make rather frequent use of these two key education databases on **BRS/After Dark**. In July alone, out of a total of 28 **Online After Six** searches run by end-users, 22 were run on ERIC, and 1 on ECER. Even more significant is the fact that these 28 searches run by end-users accounted for 20 % of a total of 141 searches altogether in July, of which the remaining 113 were performed in the traditional manner by librarian intermediaries on behalf of their clients.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED WITH BRS AFTER DARK:

(A) by clients:

(1) Many clients, especially those who had never used a terminal or computer before, had quite a lot of trouble narrowing down their searches to produce precise enough results satisfactory to them. Very few had ever encountered Boolean logic before using **BRS After Dark**, and many had difficulty with all but the most basic search strategies. The most common pitfall we have observed amongst our end-users is that they generally use too many terms, especially when oring. Negative Boolean logic is often poorly understood. Perhaps those end-users who use the service frequently will eventually overcome this hurdle. We consider this to be the major problem end-users face with online searching.

(2) Some clients seemed baffled by hardware and system problems, such as line transmission errors, error messages from the mainframe, loss of the telecommunications network etc.

(3) Our librarians assisting end-users have repeatedly commented that clients running their own searches seem to make the most errors with the online printing commands. End-users often are confused by the four questions the system asks before online printing actually starts. **BRS** should perhaps try to make the online printing command sequence easier to use.

(4) Users often seem unaware of the range of databases they can consult to search their topic. Recently, an end-user intended to run a search on "misleading advertising" on ABI/INFORM alone. Only the advice of an experienced online searcher convinced her to search Management Contents and SSCI as well, to ensure a more comprehensive search. This, of couse, is one of the prime reasons we have established a daytime referral service for **Online After Six** searchers.

(B) by staff:

(1) Librarians have found that the assistance they have felt obliged to provide end-users has been more extensive than we had planned for in our Regulations. In order to ensure end-users achieved at least acceptable search results, librarians often worked out in some detail the end-user's search strategy, including the Boolean logic required (Cf. clients' problems (1) above).

(2) Some of our librarians have little online experience. These persons found it difficult to provide end-users with any but the most basic assistance with either hardware or software problems.

(3) Just as clients found it hard to grasp the printing command sequence, all librarians except our experienced searchers were equally frustrated in trying to help end-users with this command.

(4) In September, when we had only one librarian on evening reference duty, our staff felt under pressure, having to deal with a busy reference desk, and cope with patron requests to use **Online After Six.** From October to the end of November, 1993, we have two reference librarians on evening desk duty. It is hoped that this will alleviate somewhat the serious pressure our staff felt trying to provide **Online After Six** along with traditional reference service in September.

So the issue of providing adequate staff support for evening end-user service is crucial to its effective operation. Any library considering the provision of after-hours end-user searching will have to fully weigh their personnel resources.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF ONLINE AFTER SIX:

To date, we have noted the following positive developments: **(A) by clients:**

(1) A good percentage (around 40%) of our end-users have had fully satisfactory results, even as first time users! This is especially true of those clients who availed themselves of our daytime referral service prior to running their own searches.

(2) All but one client in Morisset Library have been pleased with the low fee we charge, considering it very reasonable.

(3) Here's a fascinating phenomenon: second-time and later "return" searchers quickly adapt to **BRS/After Dark**'s menu-driven system, and find it easy to use (Cf. September Online, p. 15). Repeat searchers soon adapt to the rigours Boolean logic imposes on their search strategies.

(4) Our advertising and poster campaign has certainly proven effective, insofar as we get many questions about the service from students being given orientations and from regular clients of our daytime Computer Search Service. We have also noticed a lot of people reading our **Online After Six** manuals kept at the reference desk!

(5) The presence of large numbers of terminals of all kinds: GEAC terminals used for the library's inhouse database, TELEVIDEO 925's placed in the Reference Department for use by Computer Science students and others, Hazeltine Esprit III's in Interlibrary Loan for electronic mail and, of couse, two terminals for online searching (one 300 and one 1200 BAUD) create an "electronic rottage" atmosphere congenial to the use of **Online After Six.**

(6) The provision of a clearly written **Online After Six** manual has proven a real asset to our end-user searchers. To date, every first-time end-user searcher has consulted this manual prior to going online! Had we not provided this manual, which contains step-by-step examples of a complete search, we are certain our patrons would have found **Online After Six** more difficult to use, especially for the first time.

(B) by staff:

(1) Although about half of our reference staff have little experience in online searching (a situation we are presently remedying!), all were enthusiastic about learning **BRS/After Dark** in the June, 1983 pre-service training session. This seminar was attended by some 25 librarians in the University Library System, all of whom ran at least two - often as many as five - practice searches. Many said they had fun learning the system too!

(2) The **Online After Six** manual was avidly devoured by reference librarians in training!

(3) We have enjoyed strong moral and financial support from the Chief Librarian, the Library Administration and all Public Services staff involved in all stages of the planning and implementation of **Online After Six.**

SUMMARY:

In summary, we may conclude that the necessary prerequesites for the establishment and effective provision of an after-hours end-user search service in an academic library are: a positive perception of the possibilities such a service may offer our clients in the first place; the necessary groundwork required to convince the Library Administration that the project is feasible (in this case by conducting a Pilot Project Survey); careful planning, coordination and training of staff prior to service start-up; provision of quality documentation to end-users; and, of course, arresting publicity. We believe that such an overall approach is bound to ensure the eventual success of a even a totally new and unheard of library service, in this case, the University of Ottawa's **Online After Six.** We are so convinced of the future of end-user searching in the academic environment that we believe it will advance in spite of of all the problems a library is likely to encounter, such as those outlined above!

CONCLUSIONS

The theme of the 8th. Annual BRS User Meeting hinges on the question: "Will End Users Take Over the Terminal?" The answer is far from clear. One thing is certain, however. The demand for end-user online searching is on the rise. For whatever reasons, the general public, and more specifically, people conducting their own research, would like to be able to search on remote computers themselves. As more and more library patrons familiarize themselves with terminals, programming and microcomputers, the demand for services like **BRS/After Dark** is bound to accelerate.

The University of Ottawa has simply anticipated the need for such a hands on library service, by implementing **Online After Six.** As far as we are concerned, the era of electronic reference, working in tandem with traditional reference, is already here. Although there will be inevitable problems getting **Online After Six** to run smoothly, we have every confidence in its future as an integral part of our everyday reference services. So I do not think the question should be: "Will end users take over the terminal?", but rather, how can end-user searching serve to supplement and enhance traditional reference, including librarian-intermediated online search services? I believe it is up to us, in both the short and the long run, to ensure the smoothest possible transition to in-house end-user searching facilities in academic and research libraries.

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